

A year ago today, President Obama signed into law the *Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act* (SAFRA). This legislation was a major step toward ensuring that our nation's higher education system is more affordable and accessible to all students. SAFRA increases the maximum Pell Grant, helping in Florida alone the 587,309 students in the state who receive these grants, and shifts all federal student lending to the Direct Loan program, saving taxpayers \$61 billion over ten years. Additionally, it creates American jobs by requiring all Direct loans to be serviced by workers in the U.S. Now, more than ever, we must invest in our education system and ensure access to affordable, quality education in order to improve our economy and remain a competitive nation. Below are some of the investments that SAFRA made in our nation's higher education system:

- \$36 billion over 10 years to increase the maximum annual Pell Grant scholarship
- \$750 million for programs which focus on increasing financial literacy and promote the retention and graduation of students
- \$1.5 billion in the Income-Based Repayment program to make federal loans more affordable for students to repay
- \$2.55 billion in Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions
- \$2 billion in a competitive grant program for the development and improvement of educational or career training programs by community colleges

By expanding access to our nation's education system, we are investing in the future of both individuals and our country as whole. Education is essential for our nation's global competitiveness and a college degree has become increasingly necessary to simply participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy. However, at the same time, post-secondary education has become increasingly expensive, keeping many students from being able to have access to a quality education and a college degree.

Yet the Republican House Majority is intent on making drastic cuts to education. Only a few weeks ago, they voted to:

- Cut Pell Grant funding for 9.4 million students
- Eliminate over 200,000 Head Start placements
- Do away with supplementary education services for 957,000 underprivileged students
- Reduce or get rid of after-school programs for 139,000 students across this nation

While SAFRA and other pieces of legislation passed by the Democratic Congress, such as the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, expanded programs which allow greater access to the higher education system, too many students are still denied access to further education due to its prohibitive costs. This truth is unfortunate, unfair, and harmful to our society. All students should be able to realize their full potential by being allowed access to a system which encapsulates the foundation of the American dream. That is why I remain dedicated to working with my colleagues in Congress to find solutions to address the issue of college access and affordability.